

Town of Lincoln

Budget Board Meeting

March 5, 2014

Present:

**​Carl Brunetti​​Hagop
Jawharjian​​Mike Babbitt​​Bob Turner
​Maria Marcello​​Paul
DiDomenico​​Paul Deutsch​​Bill
DiBiasio
​Richard Foster**

Absent:

​Bill McManus​​Rhonda Lacombe

Call to Order

The meeting began at 7:32 pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

There were no public comments or questions at the time.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of February 27th were distributed for review.

Bill DiBiasio made a motion, seconded by Richard Foster, to accept the minutes.

The minutes were accepted by a vote of 8-0 with Bob Turner

abstaining as he was not present on February 27th.

Correspondence

The Budget Board did receive answers to all of their questions so far from the School Department as well as disks with detail of the roof and security projects.

They may have more questions as they review the recommended budgets, and will pass them along to the School Department if they do.

Business

FY15 Education Budget

The Budget Board had their annual School Tour on Saturday, and noted that the staff was very cooperative and informative.

They noted that the new Head of Grounds and Maintenance did a very good job becoming familiar with the schools so soon after he took the position.

Members of the School Committee were present to discuss their recommended FY15 Education Budget.

Capital Projects

The Budget Board questioned who would control any revenues received in relation to a new turf field.

The School Department would control those revenues, but they have not devised a plan yet as they are currently working on the detail of

the field project first.

It was noted that the schools should consider setting those revenues aside into a sinking fund that would then be used for things like maintenance, future replacement, etc.

It seems there could be as much as \$100,000 a year in revenue coming in from organizations that would pay to use the field, and even make the field their “home” field.

Those organizations that would pay to use the field often carry their own insurance binders, but there would still be some small exposure to the Town.

It was noted that other towns that rent out their turf fields, such as Cumberland, generally do not have to advertise to be booked as there are a number of organizations out there looking for turf fields to play on.

In discussion, it was noted that it is not clear yet who would be in charge of maintaining the new field and whether it would be the School Department/Athletic Director, the Parks and Recreation Department, or a subcontracted management company.

The management of the field would be by the School Department, particularly during the school day and during the school year but the municipality could also be involved as the proposal is that the majority of the funds for the project would come from the Municipal Budget put through the schools for reimbursement purposes.

The Budget Board will also discuss options of responsibility for the field with the Town Administrator.

Another option discussed would be to look at getting an organization to bid for naming rights to the field, which could bring in a considerable amount of revenue to offset the cost of the project and maintenance.

It was noted that turf fields often get use year-round without the need for a subsurface heating system at an extra cost.

The Budget Board received information from a knowledgeable source that specified things that should be done to get ready for a turf field project.

The School Committee noted that the schools are in the process of collecting soil samples to prepare for the project.

The Budget Board noted that there were other things that would be needed before beginning such as a drainage evaluation, a master plan, etc.

Those items should be complete and a plan in place before the project is submitted to voters for approval, so much more information is needed.

Operating Budget:

It was noted that there is a \$1,219,000 difference between the School Department and Town Administrator recommended budgets.

The Budget Board's final recommended budget for the Financial Town Meeting will likely fall somewhere in between those two

recommendations.

Salaries and Benefits constitute 81% of the entire education budget.

The Budget Board asked if there were any major concerns or new information that the Budget Board should be aware of regarding the education budget as they begin their deliberations.

The School Committee distributed projected enrollment information from Blackstone Valley Prep for the next five years as well as a spreadsheet that show increasing tuition costs as well.

It was noted that the projections represent a maximum level of enrollment allotted to the Town.

The School Department does not maintain their own projections, but use historical information and projections from the state and the charter schools.

A large amount of new charter school enrollments do come in for Kindergarten and it was noted that tuition is the same for every grade. There will be a High School Program starting up, but current projections say there won't be large increases of enrollments there until the current younger students already in the charter schools age up.

Charter School tuitions are currently being phased in, and 2015-2016 will be the first year that the full cost of tuition will be recognized.

The charter school tuition formula is based on the same criteria for

each community including the amount of state aid they receive.

The Budget Board questioned whether when compared to similar communities, Lincoln pays a comparable cost of tuition for charter schools because it may be something they should contest.

The Budget Board discussed that according to projections, the enrollments at the schools will be going down as well as charter school enrollments going up, and they noted that the School Department and Committee should be looking at the possibility of reductions in staff.

The School Committee agreed that they should look at reductions in staff over time, and noted that they base teacher recalls in June on many factors including charter school enrollments but that they do also still need to consider all student needs at all levels and there are still minimum graduation requirements that must be met.

The School Committee discussed that something that will need to be looked at, which is an issue for a lot of communities, is to review and fix the revenue formula which has already been fixed on the state funding side of it.

The Budget Board discussed what the Town can do to prevent a mass exodus to charter schools, and why more students are choosing them now.

Things like longer school days, longer school years, and better test results may be a draw for charter schools, which the public schools

do not have the resources to compete with, but maybe a survey of, for example, families with Kindergarteners who are entering charter schools may give more information and insight as to why they are going that way.

The Budget Board and School Committee discussed whether some day the charter schools would also become dependent on the state funding formula and whether it should be challenged legislatively if that did happen.

The Budget Board feels that the Town does not do enough to promote and advertise the good things that are happening in its schools and for its students and alumni.

In order to compete with charter schools who have a mandated advertising budget, they should be focusing more on those positive things possibly even with a pamphlet mailing to all taxpayers.

For example, the charter schools more aggressively publicize their test scores, but according to the School Committee when compared with similar communities Lincoln is towards the top with their test scores when taking into account more complicated factors such as community size and demographics.

Also, Lincoln provided a NECAP Review Course which many students took before they administered the testing, and are waiting for the results to find out if there is any correlation of the students who took the review doing better on the testing so that they can target how to

continue to improve those scores.

FY15 Municipal Budget

There was no new information regarding the Municipal Budget as the Budget Board will be meeting with the Town Administrator at their next meeting on Thursday, March 6th.

Public Comment

Town Administrator T. Joseph Almond noted that besides a startup fund from benefactors, charter schools do not receive any funds other than tuition out of which they have been able to build, promote, and effectively run their schools.

They are held to the same standards, regulations, RI Department of Education, Uniform Chart of Accounts, etc. that the public schools are.

Prior to charter schools coming into existence, Lincoln had been seeing a number of students choosing to go to private schools as well, and the Administrator agreed that it has to do with results and testing as parents believe their children will get a better education outside of the public school system.

His main concerns then are:

- 1. Is the Town funding its schools properly? (he believes it is)**
- 2. How can the system improve to bring back the students that are leaving to go to charter schools and private schools?**
- 3. Since state funding levels will be phasing out in 2 years for charter students, how can the Town start to prepare for that now?**

He noted that Lincoln has not changed dramatically demographically, and that if anything it has improved.

If the Town treats the school system like a business, they would want to restructure and maybe add more marketing of the positive things that are going on with students and their achievements, both academically and in extracurricular activities and sports.

The Budget Board noted that with Certified and Support Staff contracts up for negotiations this year, and with the budget approaching the state mandated cap each year one of the things that they may want to concentrate on when working on that would be health care since it has seen a large increase.

Jennifer London, Middle School Teacher and Parent, noted that as an educator, the sooner the children are in the public school system the quicker they can receive whatever services it is they may need which will improve their eventual outcome.

She also noted that in classrooms, in Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd Grades in particular, the number of students is too high, and in some cases maybe even higher than contractually allowed and she was concerned because those numbers seem to be getting higher and higher.

At the Middle School there is a Committee that has been put together to make the public aware of things going on and increase the school's marketing.

The School Committee noted that they would look into those enrollment numbers and the numbers could also be skewed by Assistants in the classroom, etc.

The closing of Fairlawn also could have contributed to an increase in class sizes in the early elementary classes.

Wendy McPeak, Middle School Teacher and Parent, also noted that there is a forum to promote the Middle School and the staff is strong but she was concerned that for 10 years now she gets laid off before being brought back every year because she feels a senior staff is important to a good system.

Jessica Galla, Parent, was also concerned about class sizes in early elementary because she has a child about to enter Kindergarten.

The Town Administrator noted that the Budget Board and voters of the Financial Town Meeting only controls how much funding is provided to the schools, and not how that money is allocated within the school system.

He noted a lower teacher-to-student ratio (1-10) and higher per-pupil cost than ever in the history of the Lincoln school system and recommended looking at a restructure and reallocation of resources to fix any problems that might exist with class sizes.

The Budget Board have asked for and received from the School Department detail of enrollments and a schematic of students by

class which they will be analyzing.

The School Committee noted that within the last 10 years a lot of things have happened in the schools, including the closing of Fairlawn which did not create a large layoff because it happened gradually over a few years.

Fred Hoppe noted that any discussions or concerns with class size are at the elementary schools, and that he believed one of the Superintendent's goals in the coming year was to work on improving class sizes at that level.

He also noted that over the years, special needs of students have increased tremendously and that many families choose to come to Lincoln for that program.

Adjourn

Bill DiBiasio made a motion, seconded by Richard Foster, to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:29 pm.